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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 000355

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: ASEC PGOV PHUM PREL ZI

SUBJECT: CONGRESS REAFFIRMS TSVANGIRAI'S GRASSROOTS SUPPORT, CHARTS CONFRONTATIONAL COURSE

REF: A. REF A: HARARE 321

1B. REF B: HARARE 319
1C. REF C: HARARE 263

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1 .4 b/

Summary

11. (C) Despite GOZ pressure, an estimated 15,000 enthusiastic delegates, many of whom traveled at their own expense, attended the MDC anti-Senate faction's Congress on March 17-19 and reaffirmed their support for Morgan Tsvangirai, who was unanimously reelected president. MPs

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Thokozani Khupe and Tendai Biti were elected to the key positions of vice president and secretary general, respectively. Although he had yet to return to Zimbabwe, former-MP Roy Bennett was unanimously appointed as treasurer.

12. (C) In his acceptance speech, Tsvangirai called for greater confrontation against ZANU-PF. The party also amended the constitution to prevent another split, weakening some leadership positions and creating new decision-making mechanisms. In contrast to the pro-Senate MDC Congress, civil society and the grassroots structures turned out in droves to support Tsvangirai and his party. End Summary.

Despite GOZ Harassment(-----

13. (C) The anti-Senate faction of the MDC held its second National Congress March 17-19 despite stepped up GOZ

intimidation of key opposition leaders in the week prior. In addition to the arms cache seizure and associated arrests, the GOZ briefly detained two other MDC MPs on putative Public Order and Security Act (POSA) infractions (ref B): Tapiwa Mashakada was detained for addressing a political rally and Timothy Mubhawu was charged with insulting the president. During the Congress, however, uniformed police were not to be seen, although there were allegations that CIO agents attempted to disrupt the proceedings.

¶4. (C) Also arrested a day before the Congress was the fiery trade unionist Raymond Majongwe. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights member Jacob Mafume on March 19 told poloff that no charges had yet been filed against Majongwe and that his arrest appeared to be intended to keep the union leader away from the Congress.

(Congress Reaffirms Tsvangirai, Elects Management Team

¶5. (SBU) Morgan Tsvangirai's Presidency of the anti-Senate faction of the MDC was reelected unanimously without opposition. Isaac Matongo also retained his position as national chairperson, although a constitutional amendment stripped the position of most powers in response to criticism that Matongo had wielded power improperly in the past. Despite his continued absence from Zimbabwe, former MP Roy Bennett was unanimously elected as treasurer.

¶6. (SBU) The Congress introduced a "one-man-one-vote" process and did away with past practice that allowed provincial chairpersons to elect key officers. National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) chairman Lovemore Madhuku, who essentially ran the second day of the Congress, spearheaded

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this reform, which was adopted partly in response to allegations of vote-buying at the provincial level. To correct for the overrepresentation of some provinces at the Congress, organizers proportioned the number of ballots to the number of wards in each province. NCA and other civil society representatives acted as "independent election observers" that managed the process.

¶7. (U) In the closest vote of the Congress, Bulawayo MP and former trade unionist Thokozani Khupe won the Vice Presidency over National Executive Council member Getrude Mthombeni. Harare MP Tendai Biti was elected secretary general over Mashakada, who was later elected deputy secretary general. Ousted Harare Mayor Elias Mudzuri was elevated to the powerful new post of organizing secretary, which received most of the authority transferred from the national chairman.

Others winning positions were Matabeleland North party chairperson Mogen Komichi (deputy organizing secretary), Matabeleland South MP Lovemore Moyo (deputy national chairperson) and former youth chairman Nelson Chamisa (spokesperson).

Turning Up the Heat on ZANU-PF

¶8. (U) Addressing the Congress, Tsvangirai declared that the MDC's agenda was to complete the liberation struggle that Mugabe had hijacked from the people and used to justify his rule for life. Saying that a new Zimbabwe would have no room for life presidents, he promised to step down as President of the MDC after Zimbabweans had liberated themselves from the current dictatorship.

¶9. (U) Tsvangirai said the anti-Senate MDC would organize mass civil action in the coming months. Rigged elections could not be the sole arena of resistance and the courts had only limited usefulness. &The dictator must brace himself for a long, bustling winter across the country...A storm is

on the horizon.⁸ Many of the civil society solidarity messages echoed these sentiments, saying it was up to Zimbabweans to work to change their own country.

¶10. (C) Elaborating on the civic action plan, Tsvangirai adviser and newly designated member of the National Executive Eddie Cross told poloffs that the opposition would form a united front with civil society to carry out this program. The plan of action would be decided at a civil society summit organized with the NCA and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) to be held in early April (Ref A). All of civil society, including churches, unions, and student organizations, would participate. Organizers of the summit had also invited the pro-Senate faction of the MDC, though Cross questioned that faction's commitment to a confrontational approach.

¶11. (C) According to Cross, the "mass action" campaign would begin in the churches on Easter, and then in May massive national demonstrations would begin. The MDC and civil society would muster hundreds of thousands of people for the demonstrations, whose aim would be to shut down those cities with GOZ-appointed managing committees.

¶12. (C) Cross said Mutare North MP and member of Parliament's defense committee Giles Mutsekwa had reached out to mid-level soldiers who confirmed that the army was largely disenchanted with the regime and would stand aside if confronted with massive demonstrations. The police, though more politicized than the army, would also allow the protests. If the security forces stood by while tens of

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thousands of people at a time demonstrated, Cross said it would signal the end of the regime.

Amending Constitution To Prevent Another Split

¶13. (U) The MDC Congress adopted a series of amendments to the party constitution that according to chief architect Tendai Biti were designed to prevent a recurrence of "October 12") the date of the National Council meeting last year that triggered the current split. Biti said the amendments were designed to make the party both more democratic and more disciplined. They confirmed the powers of the president as the leader and chief principal officer of the party while diluting the authority of the secretary general and national chairperson. However, the new constitution also increased the authority of the National Council, allowing it to change and formulate new policies as well as amend decisions made by the National Executive.

¶14. (C) The new constitution also created External Assemblies as a means to tap into the political expertise and financial backing of Zimbabweans living abroad. Such Assemblies in certain countries) Biti suggested that South Africa, the UK, and US would each have an Assembly) would be granted the same powers as provinces. (N.B. The diaspora is a huge but untapped source of potential MDC support. Eddie Cross told us that with only a couple of weeks notice, the MDC raised more than 30,000 rand from South Africa and about 1,500 pounds from the UK for the Congress.)

Congress Deflates Kitchen Cabinet

¶15. (C) According to civil society contacts, the Congress dealt a blow to the much-criticized "kitchen cabinet" of advisers surrounding Tsvangirai. The introduction of universal suffrage in the election meant that the unpopular advisers could no longer count on backroom deals to secure new positions and the election results showed that these appointees had virtually no support. Election director Ian

Makoni, for instance, placed a distant third in the secretary general race with only 88 votes and Dennis Murira dropped out of the race for organizing secretary after he drew only polite applause from the crowd, compared to the roaring cheer that greeted Mudzuri. Moreover, the new constitution prevents staff members from contesting future elections.

Congress Revives Grassroots, Shows Popularity

¶16. (SBU) In marked contrast to the pro-Senate MDC Congress (Ref C), civil society and the grassroots structures turned out in large numbers to support Tsvangirai and his party. Congress organizers said that more than 40 civic groups had sent solidarity messages, including ZCTU and the university students' union. Perhaps foreshadowing collaboration on future mass action, the NCA played a key role in the Congress; Madhuku's address cast the NCA and MDC as "like twins" and called for a united front against ZANU-PF. Projecting support from the Ndebele people, local NGO group Bulawayo Agenda sent Peter Khumalo, a descendant of the last Ndebele king, as one of its representatives.

¶17. (C) Clearly evident at the Congress was the determination of average supporters to go to great personal lengths to participate. Cross told us that the party had

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only managed to collect enough money to pay for transportation from four provinces, with participants from the remaining eight having to pay their own way. (N.B. Also in marked contrast to the pro-Senate faction, which received government funds to pay for its Congress.) Noting the sacrifices made by many to attend, Congress speakers frequently thanked supporters for selling their chickens and goats to raise funds for their travel. Unlike the pro-Senate Congress at which participants became agitated due to delays in the delivery of promised food, participants at the Harare Congress were in high spirits even during the lengthy delegate registration process.

¶18. (C) The MDC Congress also demonstrated that Tsvangirai enjoyed the support of elected municipal officials. Organizers paid tribute to the MDC elected mayors, including those who have been forced out of office by the GOZ. Approximately ten of the mayors (including Mudzuri and the ousted mayors of Chitungwiza and Mutare) were present. (N.B. Bulawayo Mayor Japhet Ndabeni Ncube, who has taken a low profile in the split, was the only notable absence.) The MPs also played a comparatively greater role than in the pro-Senate Congress, with those assembled in Harare taking the stage to show their support. Included among the MPs was Binga MP Joel Gabbuza, who was originally listed as one of the parliamentarians that sided with the pro-Senate faction at its February Congress. (N.B Post understands that another MDC MP from Matabeleland North is contemplating switching to the anti-Senate side.)

Comment

¶19. (C) The anti-Senate faction's Congress conclusively demonstrated that Tsvangirai enjoys the preponderance of support among the MDC's grassroots and among its civil society allies. Taken together, the two Congresses show that the MDC split is more of a leadership fracture - a splinter rather than a split - that does not extend to the grassroots. In addition, in marked contrast to the pro-senate Congress, which attacked Tsvangirai at least if not more often than Mugabe, this Congress's agenda was firmly on confronting the regime and its leadership seems united around mass action. Overcoming the fear and despair that pervades the general populace will not be easy, but the MDC's impressive organization and energy at the Congress were a good start.

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